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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003527

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SUBJECT: JOE Q. VOTER'S DECEMBER 3 EXPERIENCE

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¶1. (U) On December 3, approximately sixteen million Venezuelans will be registered to vote for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV) next President. Using one of approximately 33,000 voting machines at about one of 11,000 voting centers, the voters will go through a fairly convoluted electronic process that in the end will either re-elect Hugo Chavez to another six-year term or catapult opposition candidate Manuel Rosales into Miraflores. The following is a play-by-play of how the voting process is designed to work on December 3.

¶2. (U) Polls are scheduled to open at 6:00am on December 3 in 23 states and Caracas. If this year is like past elections, many polling stations will not be operating until 8:00am or 9:00am. Voters will arrive at their voting centers and locate their specific voting tables by matching the last two digits of their cedula (national identification) numbers against voter registry listings posted at each center. In eight states and the city of Caracas, voters will then be required to approach a fingerprint machine where their thumbprint will be electronically captured. Theoretically, these devices are used to prevent multiple voting. Anticipating some reluctance from voters, approximately 700 federal attorneys will be deployed in these states to handle voters who refuse to submit to the electronic scanners or deal with other irregularities. Press reports indicate that those who do not cooperate will not be allowed to vote and will be "escorted" to one of 214 tribunals in operation on election day.

¶3. (U) The fingerprinting process complete, these voters, like voters in all other states, will then be required to approach their voting tables, where a polling station worker will locate their names and corresponding biographic data in the voter registry book for that table. Voters will sign by their names and place an ink thumbprint next to their signatures.

¶4. (U) The actual voting for President will be more complicated than simply voting for Rosales or Chavez, or one of about a dozen other minor candidates. Voters will have three minutes to decipher a convoluted electronic ballot that provides the voter with 86 options, corresponding to different political parties. Voters will select one of these 86 political party emblems on the ballot, each with a small photo of the presidential contender identified as that party's flag-bearer, as well as the party's emblem. Once a selection is made, the voter's preference will appear on a video screen. If the image on the screen matches the voter's

preference, the voter will then touch the screen where it says "vote," and that voter's ballot is electronically cast. Alternatively, if the image on the screen does not match the voter's preference, the voter will have the opportunity to cancel that selection and select again. In the event the three minutes lapse before the voter has had the opportunity to complete the process, the voter can alert a poll worker and receive three additional minutes to electronically cast a ballot. Any voter who fails to complete the vote during the additional three minutes will see his or her vote nullified.

15. (U) While the electronic ballots cast will represent the official tally, transmitted after the entire voting process at that polling center is complete for the day, in most cases via the telephone company CANTV, from each voting center to the CNE, the machines will also produce a paper receipt for each voter, identifying that elector's selection. The voter, upon leaving the voting machine, checks the receipt to see if it matches his or her vote, and then will drop the paper receipt in a "ballot box." At this point, however, the voter will have no real recourse if the designation on the paper "ballot" does not match the voter's preferred selection, and indeed, the paper is legally not the ballot: only the "electronic ballot" created in the voting booth is the legal ballot. The poll workers, however, in conjunction with political party observers upon completion of the voting process will randomly select a number of ballot boxes depending on the number of tables at each voting center to manually count, hopefully reconciling with the electronically cast votes (see para 7).

16. (U) Following the entire voting process, each voter will have his/her little finger dipped in indelible ink to prevent the voter from voting more than once. Polling stations are scheduled to close at 4:00pm; however, they are instructed to remain open as long as there are voters waiting in line to cast their ballots.

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17. (U) An audit to be conducted at each polling center upon termination of the entire voting process, as agreed to by the CNE, should result in the counting of a minimum of 53% of the paper receipts. Boxes are supposed to be chosen at random by poll workers and party witnesses after the polls have closed and the machines have printed their final tally sheets, in accordance with the number of tables at each voting center. Poll workers will count the receipts and compare them with the total number of votes registered on the tally sheet. This audit is not binding, and no clear procedures have been delineated for challenging the results if the numbers do not reconcile.

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